

Sermon for Easter 6A
Sunday, May 14, 2023
“Our Constant Advocate”

Text: John 14:15-21

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

During Eastertide, our attention is repeatedly directed at our proclamation that Christ is risen and that we have seen the Lord. This morning’s gospel lesson takes our proclamation of the Easter message in a different direction. When we come across these words from the Gospel according to John it is clear to us that Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit. “I will not leave you alone,” Jesus says, “You see me in the flesh right now, but I am going back to the Father soon. However, I will leave you with a spirit that’s already here, but will become more real for you in due time.” Jesus knows his time on earth is nearing an end and prepares his followers through this Farewell Discourse, which we read in Chapters 14-17 of St. John’s Gospel. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, while at the same time gives them a plan for moving forward after he is gone—with the Holy Spirit going along side to guide and comfort them. Jesus is already revealing to them a little more about the Godhead, because he is revealing to them the aspects of the Trinity. He told them that he was sending “another Advocate,” for Christ was the first Advocate who revealed God to the world. He did not mean that the Holy Spirit would replace him, but rather that the Spirit would be sent to them so that they could continue his work. Jesus, the Word made flesh, would reveal God by his life and by his death; the Holy Spirit would continue to reveal God, not by becoming incarnate, like Jesus, but through the actions of humankind, who would continue God’s work into the future.

John’s Gospel was written about a half-century after Jesus’s departure for a community of devoted followers of John’s theological perspective of Jesus—which, as you know, is focused more on his divinity and connection to the Father. They were a community of people living in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem some thirty years before, in a province of the Roman Empire called Judea in a culture deeply influenced by Greek philosophy. Life wasn’t particularly easy for them; there was a lot of poverty, injustice, and corruption; the tensions between the Roman religion, Judaism, and the emerging Christian communities were high. If there was one thing the devotees of John, the beloved disciple, needed, it was comfort and reassurance not to give up.

We can easily find parallels in our own time that show that the need comfort and reassurance is timeless. We are faced with political conflicts in every corner of the globe. We are plagued by threats and acts of terrorism. We live with the reality of injustices inflicted on people of various groupings, violence, threats to access to health care and education, poverty, physical abuse, addiction, the rise of secularism, corruption, the list goes on. We deal with many pressures, and so we have a great need for comfort and reassurance. The comforting words of Jesus that he would send us an advocate to be with us always are just as relevant today as they were in the 1st Century.

The word that is translated in the gospel reading as “advocate” is rendered in some Bible translations as “comforter” or “paraclete.” It comes from the Greek word *parakletos*. ‘*Para*’ meaning along side + ‘*kletos*’ meaning one who is called. In the ancient world, a *parakletos* could mean a lawyer in a legal sense, an advocate, a guide, or someone who stands up for someone else. The advocate that Jesus speaks about is one who is called to walk along side us, one who will guide us and stand up for us.

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed somebody to speak up for you, defend you, or vouch for you? Have you ever been faced with a difficult situation where you needed someone to lean on and hold you up, support you to get through whatever tribulation was in front of you? It’s a beautiful thing to have a trusted friend, relative, colleague, priest who can be a comfort in times of need. Isn’t it wonderful that we have an Advocate, a Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, which is God’s real and tangible way of walking along side us to guide us, stand up for us, and vouch for us as we journey through this troubled world and the ups and downs of life.

But the Paraclete does more for us also. As the one who stands beside us, the Holy Spirit leads, guides, comforts, encourages, and supports us who are called to carry on God’s work in the world. The work sometimes seems hard, we might even feel like we’re not making much of a difference, or no matter what anybody does, nothing seems to change for the better. A lot of people feel that they are worse off today than they were before, at a time long past. Without the Holy Spirit, we might just give up—the devil would win, but the Paraclete advocates for us against the accuser, the adversary, and emboldens us not to stop.

Today is also Rogation Sunday, which begins the four days of Rogationtide. To *rogate* means to pray. During the next four days, we will pray for a good harvest as fields are being planted, we will pray for our local businesses and commerce, and we will pray for the proper use of God’s creation. These are essential to keep us going from day-to-day and year-to-year: a good harvest gives us food and drink to nourish and hydrate us; the businesses in our community serve us in countless ways, by keeping us well-groomed, supplying us with the tools to fix things that are broken, providing us with a variety of cuisines and places to heal us when we get sick; and, taking care of God’s creation supports the survival of life on this planet, including our own.

Today is *also* Mother’s Day. On this day, we honor the important women in our lives, be they biological relatives or not, who mothered us in significant ways. These are the strong women who have been our paracletes, offering us love, comfort, guidance, support, and encouragement. Even if your biological mother wasn’t there for that, hopefully another woman was: a grandmother, an aunt, a teacher, a partner. All of us have another mother, too. That’s our blessed Lady, the Mother of God, Mary who, like a paraclete, intercedes, prays, and advocates on our behalf to God for our protection, comfort, and needs. Plus, she guides us by always directing our attention to Jesus, to remind us that God is always with us.

That presence of God is constant, as Jesus told his disciples: “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” We are reassured of this in the Holy Eucharist in which

the tangible Presence of Christ becomes real and known to us to renew and reinvigorate us to keep on keeping on. Whatever is happening in your life, whatever uncertainties of life you might be dealing with, we have not been left orphaned or comfortless—we are not alone, because we have the Spirit of God who walks along side us as our advocate, comfort, and guide for us to keep going now and unto the ages of ages. The paraclete gives reassurance and strength to all of us who, through our baptism, have vowed to continue in the apostles' teaching, in prayer and fellowship; in resisting evil; in striving for the justice, peace, and respect of all people; and, in proclaiming that we have seen the risen Lord, and his paraclete is in our midst to walk alongside us and encourage us never to give up. Amen.

Resources

Karoline Lewis, http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1995

Craig R. Koester, "Commentary on John 14:15-21" in *The Working Preacher*,
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=934